1984-01-17
Charlottesville Daily Progress (p.1)

Progress Photo by Jim Carpenter

Robert Monroe At Control Panel For Sound Equipment
nstitute In Nelson County Studies Various Levels Of Conciousness

Out-Of-Body Experiences Initiated Man's Research

By KATHY HOKE
of The Progress Staff

NELLYSFORD — In 1958, New York City radio broadcaster Robert A. Monroe began to leave his body.

The unexplained experiences of his mind, via a second body, traveling across the country and to parts unknown initiated his studies into human consciousness — a pursuit that eventually drew him from a successful broadcasting career to full-time research at his 800-acre institute along the Blue Ridge in Nelson County.

Monroe said the response from his 1971 book, Journeys Out of the Body, encouraged him to devote more time to his research. More than 200,000 copies of the book have been sold in six languages.

Monroe, who wrote the prime-time radio program "Rocky Gordon" in the early 1940s, said he began his research when "a strange series of events started happening to me some years ago."

The events, his out-of-body experiences, or "OOBEs" prompted him to explore various levels of consciousness.

"In order to learn to control my own out-of-body experiences, I had to learn what it was," he said. "It was a form of energy. The greatest use of that energy is consciousness."

Although the studies at the Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences have attracted more than 4,000 people since it was formed in 1973, few Nelson residents know much about it. Some of its neighbors don't want

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to know, either.

"I've heard different people talk about how they think there's some kind of a cult religion over there," said Betty Ann Duncan, who lives about three miles from the institute.

"You never see any of them out," she said. "They mind their own business, whatever their business is."

Monroe and his staff admit they do little to change the institute's local image, although they welcome visitors.

"You start talking about the brain or the mind, and it's cloaked in all this old-fashioned occult type of approach," says Nancy Honeycutt, Monroe's step-daughter and director of programs at the institute.

"You wouldn't believe the misconceptions," she said. "It saddens me that it should be so mystified."

After conducting consciousness programs and research across the country, Monroe moved the institute in 1979 from his Afton farm in Albemarle County to Nellysford.

Just west of the institute's three educational buildings, about 60 families will live in a community Monroe calls the New Land. Already, about 20 New Landers have moved into the energy-efficient homes, and five more houses are under construction.

In seven-day seminars offered about 10 times per year, Monroe, 68, and other institute staffers teach visitors how to explore higher states of consciousness.

"We don't advertise," Ms. Honeycutt said. "People find out about us through word-of-mouth."

For $850, participants use a series of tapes and exercises designed to explore higher states of consciousness.

They begin their days at 6 a.m. listening to a tape in a paneled chamber or alcove called a Controlled Holistic Environmental Chamber. The CHEC units are furnished with sophisticated stereo speakers and headphones, air mattresses and lights.

Called the Gateway Program, the seminars use Monroe's patented sound process called hemi-synchronization, or "hemi-sync." The technique involves sending audio pulses to create electrical signals in the brain. Monroe says the process enhances communication in both halves of the brain.

"Ideally, at the very least, the person learns how to relax so deeply without any kind of help," Ms. Honeycutt said. "Eventually, they don't use the tapes anymore.

"Beyond that, the person learns to achieve and control various levels of consciousness, or you could say expanded states of awareness," she said.

Some participants increase abilities in creative problem-solving, concentration or pain control. Oth-

ers reach "peak experiences," she said.

"Some people actually have found it increases their ability in physical coordination and speed and their control over emotions," Ms. Honeycutt said.

Monroe says about 25 percent of the participants have an out-of-body experience during the program, although that is not the intent of the program.

"We're dealing with a simple thing called sound," Monroe said. "We do not use any chemicals — they either distort or dull consciousness."

Monroe, who founded Jefferson Cable in Charlottesville in 1962 but sold his interest in it in 1976, said his research has been "infiltrating the main stream — seeping is a better word."

In an interview last week, he said that somewhere in the world, at least two executives are using his "Catnapper" tape to help them avoid jetlag. The 30-minute tape "seems to help them create a biological clock and time shift," he said.

He also hopes to begin commercial marketing his "Sound Sleeper" tape, which is now available only through the institute. Monroe says the tape helps insomniacs to sleep by using the hemi-sync process to aid the brain in developing the necessary patterns for sleep.

Among the more famous people to pass through the Monroe Institute include actor Eddie Albert and death-and-dying author Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a Highland County resident. Actor Jon Voight participated in one of Monroe's sessions in California.

The Gateway program attracts mostly professional people from across the country and overseas, says Ms. Honeycutt, with relatively few from Virginia participating in the program. Many of the psychologists, medical doctors, academics, teachers and professors who attend later apply their experiences to their work, she said.

The institute's research, for example, has enabled first-grade public school students in Tacoma, Wash., to master reading skills almost a year earlier than they would without listening to Monroe's hemi-sync process while they learn, according to a philosphy professor at Tacoma Community College who has participated in Monroe's programs.

Monroe's ideas have also been used to control pain in illness and surgery, help stroke victims recover, and tennis and golf players play better. Those who wish to improve their concentration and memory can buy a "super learning package" of two tapes for $22 from the institute.